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TAGS: [MOPS](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [NATO](#) [AF](#)
SUBJECT: ISAF STABILITY OPERATION IN FARAH TO SUPPORT
MOUNTAIN THRUST

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: ISAF has begun a stability operation in Farah province to mitigate potential affects of Operation Mountain Thrust. Known as Operation Turtle, the activity consists of three elements: security, engagement, and development. On the security side, ISAF has begun increasing its ground assets in Farah as well as targeting intelligence, air, and medical assets to assist. Engagement is designed to improve the outreach capability of the provincial government. Development will widen the focus of aid projects to areas where there is a perception of insecurity. ISAF will focus its projects on roads, power, and irrigation, in coordination with USAID and other members of the aid community. ISAF has also expressed a willingness to support the Afghan National Police in Farah with additional equipment, as necessary. Overall, Operation Turtle is a very positive indication of ISAF IX,s more activist approach to stability operations in Afghanistan, although long-term stability will depend on the provincial government and ANP,s ability to take on these duties. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) ISAF Senior staff briefed the diplomatic community on June 22 on recent increased security activity in Farah province, known as Operation Turtle. In attendance were representatives, most at the ambassadorial level, of Spain, Canada, Lithuania, Japan, German, Netherlands, Denmark, EU,

UNAMA, and U.S. (polmiloff). UK, France, and Italy were also expected but did not attend.

¶3. (SBU) The unclassified ISAF brief began with the perception of a "security dip" in Farah, due to the increase in security incidents since last year - 32 in the first half of 2006, compared to 17 for all of ¶2005. Most of the incidents were sporadic small arms fire and IEDs - there have not been any organized attacks in large numbers, nor are these predicted, the briefer said. (PRT Comment: based on local security assessments, PRT anticipates that larger-scale attacks may occur in the near future. End comment.)

¶4. (SBU) However, ISAF expects that as Operation Mountain Thrust cleans out areas in northern Helmand and western Uruzgan, there will be some influx of insurgents from the north and east into the ISAF area of operation, in particular Farah. Indeed, according to the briefer they are already starting to see this influx. Moreover, there has also been an increase in insurgents in Farah coming north from Nimroz, particularly into Bela Balouk, Gulistan, and Khak-es-fed districts.

¶5. (SBU) To carry out this security operation, ISAF forces will partner with the ANA 207 Corps based in Herat. To date, this is the largest and most coordinated activity of its kind to be undertaken by ISAF since it began operations.

Operation Turtle Main Elements

¶6. (SBU) The operation has three elements:

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Security, engagement, and development.

- Security: The main effort is to facilitate reconstruction and development to actively assist the further reach of GOA authority in Farah province. It consists of reinforcing Farah province and the Shindand district of Herat with theater assets to include extra troops, intelligence assets, air power, and medical assets. ISAF is particularly concerned to protect the ring road, and to that end has reinforced the area with extra soldiers from ISAF's emergency reserve capability. Air support is provided by Dutch F-16s, and ISAF has a commitment from OEF forces to lend airborne assets as needed. Medical assets (Greek/Albanian) have been moved from Kandahar to Herat for easier access. Planning for the operation started over a month ago and the operation began with deployment of increased personnel o/a June 17. The briefer reported that there has been no contact with the enemy yet, but that the increased number of security personnel has been seen and noticed.

- Engagement: Primary themes are to promote the authority of the GOA; ISAF and ANSF are maintaining security in order to enable development. Engagement will take the form of face-to-face meetings (key leaders and patrols); media/press (Afghan and ISAF), loudspeaker messages in rural areas, billboards and leaflets, radio and tv messages, and dissemination of crank radios.

- Development: Based on the principles that development should be Afghan owned, ISAF enabled, wholly collaborative, and sustainable. ISAF IX brings capabilities in technical and physical assistance, situation awareness, communications and liaison reach, and targeted security effort to

enable development programs. During the brief, several maps and charts were presented showing the laydown of development projects in Farah compared against areas where there have been security incidents or there is a local perception of insecurity. It was determined that the ISAF PRT should to the extent possible extend its support to development projects in outlying areas where there is this perception of insecurity. ISAF is looking particularly at road, power, and irrigation projects. The briefers emphasized that they are coordinating its development planning with USAID and other aid organizations as well as CFC-A where appropriate.

17. (SBU) ISAF is also considering how it can support the ANP in Farah. ISAF Brigadier General Davis, who has the lead for reconstruction and development, is working with the PRT to identify equipment needs for the police, in coordination with CSTC-A.

Comment

18. (SBU) PRT Comment: To make the development aspect of this operation sustainable, the Provincial Coordination Center and ANP resources will have to be enhanced. In particular, improved transportation

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and communications equipment will help with operational capability and reach. The ANP,s increased sustainable abilities will provide the long-term stability needed when Operation Turtle concludes.

19. (SBU) Embassy Comment: The ANP national fielding plan and recent rebalancing has focused on expediting equipment delivery to the provinces east of Farah. While CSTC-A recently delivered weapons and ammunition to the Farah provincial police, anything more that ISAF can do to strengthen the ANP would be very welcome, and we will pursue this here. Overall, Operation Turtle is a positive indication of ISAF,s commitment, under British leadership, to take a more active approach to stability operations in the areas for which it has responsibility. The recognition that Operation Mountain Thrust will have consequences for ISAF areas even before the Phase III handover, and ISAF,s willingness to increase its assets in Farah to respond to this potential threat, is another positive sign of the British approach. ISAF,s briefing for the international community, which was both professional and informative, was also a very positive step in bringing together disparate elements of the NATO/ISAF diplomatic community in Kabul in support of ISAF IX,s more activist approach.

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